



Indiana AID

THE INSIDE VIEW

March 2024 / Vol 9

Family Fun Night Fundraiser Recap!

Toward the end of January, Indiana AID hosted its first in-person fundraising event. The Family Fun Night Fundraiser was held at Shalom Mennonite Church, and though it was a blustery, rainy night, we are so grateful to the great people who came out to support the work our group is doing!

With the help of multiple wonderful volunteers from Shalom, attendees had a variety of activities to choose from. There was an obstacle course set up, multiple fun minute-to-win-it games, face painting, a dance room, crown making, and some great deals were made in the silent auction! Folks also had the opportunity to win prizes through a raffle that was pulled multiple times throughout the night.

As people arrived for the fundraiser, they paid an entry fee for the event, which went directly to supporting Indiana AID. All the activities were free to play and people could choose to support Indiana AID further by buying food and drinks, purchasing raffle tickets, participating in the silent auction, or choosing to donate directly.



Through the generous support of those who attended the event or gave online, we are grateful that we raised enough funds to continue to support our detained partners for a period of time. It was truly meaningful to see other's hearts join our own in caring for individuals detained by ICE.



Monthly reports from the last few months

January

- Commissary totals: \$1,769.60
- Books: \$268.86
- Visits: 24

February

- Commissary totals: \$806.40
- Books: \$61.69
- Visits: 8+

Majority of March

- Commissary totals: \$1030.40
- Books: \$106.65
- Visits: 5+

“Welcome to Jail”

Our visits let these men know they are not forgotten

In February, one of our volunteers, Jeanne Rhoades Smucker, had an article published in the *Anabaptist World*, where she shared her experience visiting detained individuals in jail. Below is Jeanne’s article, reprinted with permission from *Anabaptist World*, also found at <https://anabaptistworld.org/welcome-to-jail/>.



The group from Shalom Mennonite Church on their first visit to the Clay County Jail, with other Indiana AID volunteers. From left, Judy Mae Foszcz, Jeanne Rhoades Smucker, Martha Yoder Maust, Robin Valenzuela, Whitney Guthrie and Brian Bither. Smucker, Maust and Bither are from Shalom.

The cell block is smaller than I imagined. It is shaped like a piece of pie with the center cut out. The cell blocks are arranged in a circle around a hub, where prison staff watch the inmates through one-way windows and video screens.

There are six round metal tables, each with four round metal stools, all bolted to the floor. On one wall is a kiosk with a monitor for video calls. There is a phone and a screen for sending written messages.

Along the opposite wall are three cells — four-person rooms with bunks and restrooms. A metal stairway leads to three more cells on the second floor. The central area extends upward to a tiny skylight high in the ceiling.

The door closes behind us, and the men gather around. Some remember us from our visit a month ago. Others are new, so we introduce ourselves.

In county jails across the country, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detains undocumented immigrants until they are deported or gain asylum. Most are deported.

Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis shares in a [group] called IndianaAID (Assistance to Immigrants in Detention). It is a volunteer group that supports people detained by ICE, bearing witness to their experiences through visits, offering information and providing resources.

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“Welcome to Jail,” continued

For two years, volunteers have been making weekly video visits to people detained in the Clay County Jail in Brazil, Ind. In October, prison officials granted us permission to hold Bible studies there once a month.

It is December, and Pastor Brian Bither begins by acknowledging it is hard to be away from your family as Christmas approaches. The men nod. Later they will share about their families. We share the IndianaAID newsletter, with a poem Miguel wrote to his children. Another man gets up and gives him a high five.

Pastor Brian talks about the biblical context of Jesus’ birth: Israel’s exile to Babylon and return, only to be taken over by Rome. People needing to travel to be counted so that they could be controlled and taxed. The men in the jail have also made a dangerous journey, crossing an invisible border, only to be controlled and taxed, with no voice.

Long ago, the expected king who came to save turned out to be a baby lying in a manger with the feed for the cattle. Shepherds, not royalty, visited him.

Then and now, things don’t turn out like you think they will. And yet, something good came out of this. The men reflect on their hopes for a better life, only to find themselves in this jail. Yet, they have built community here.

An Irish man who has been here a long time and only speaks English is quick to show newcomers the ropes. An Arabic-speaking man sits sadly through the Bible study in Spanish and English. Afterward, the men ask for a Spanish-Arabic dictionary so they can communicate with him. Those who are bilingual translate. They nod as others share their stories and reflections.

The door opens, and three men come in. Wearing the orange-striped outfits of ICE detainees, they carry their bedrolls and bag of clothes. They are directed to a cell on the second level. The other men look up and call a *bienvenidos* (welcome) to them.

Who wants to be welcomed to a jail cell? After they unload their few things, the others gather around and begin to orient them to the environment.

We try to open the door for them to reflect on the unfairness of finding themselves here. They say they have found both hope and disappointment. Despite how they have been treated, this country holds hope for them.

Some hope for release and asylum, others for a quick deportation. All hope to be reunited with loved ones. We listen to their stories. We take notes on how we might help from the outside. We share resources. Our presence lets them know they are not forgotten. We pray with them. And promise to be back next month.

*Jeanne Rhoades Smucker is a retired pediatric nurse practitioner and member of Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis. She has published a memoir, *Llano Grande: Growing Up as a Missionary Child in Ecuador*.*

Immigration Updates

- [A report released this month](#) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) found that refugees and asylees have generated tens of billions of dollars more in local, state, and federal tax revenues over the last 15 years than they have cost in direct government services
- [USCIS is updating their fees and changes go into effect April 1, 2024](#). Though some fees were significantly increased, others were adjusted in a way that will help many.
 - Green card replacement/renewal - REDUCED
 - Naturalization - REDUCED - now up to 400% of poverty level)
 - Family petitions & naturalization for military and veterans - FEES ELIMINATED
 - Humanitarian visas for survivors of certain crimes - U-visa, T-visa, VAWA & SIJS - FEES ELIMINATED
- [On Tuesday, 3/19/24, the Supreme Court allowed the controversial Texas state law S.B. 4 to move forward while litigation continues](#). It was almost immediately paused by the Fifth Circuit court while it decides whether the law should be allowed to move forward.
 - This state law would make it a misdemeanor to cross or attempt to cross the border between Texas and Mexico between ports of entry
 - It would then elevate to a felony for anyone caught re-entering.
 - The law would also "authorize - and in some cases require - Texas judges, who are not trained in immigration law and have no proper authority to enforce it, to order individuals deported."

Contact Us

- Email: IndianaAID.contact@gmail.com
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Follow Us

- Website: <https://www.indianaaid.org>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IndianaAID/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/indianaaid/>

Volunteer

Currently, our greatest needs are for...

- Spanish-speaking visitation partners
- Visitation partners who speak languages other than English and Spanish
- Financial support/fundraising experience
- Website and social media specialists

Donate



<https://www.indianaaid.org/donate>

- Indiana AID is a volunteer group funded 100% on donations. Please consider a tax-deductible donation via the QR code or link above.
- Shalom Mennonite Church is our fiscal sponsor - you will be taken to their site's giving page where you will first select an amount to give and then choose the fund where you would like your money to go, "Indiana AID Fund." None of the money donated to Indiana AID goes to the church's budget.
- You can also donate by sending a check to the church with "Indiana AID" in the memo line.
 - Shalom Mennonite Church
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